

HEBREW HOPES OF HEAVEN

BY MADISON C. PETERS

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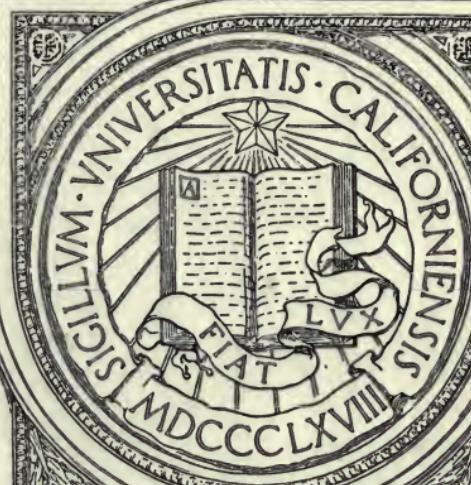
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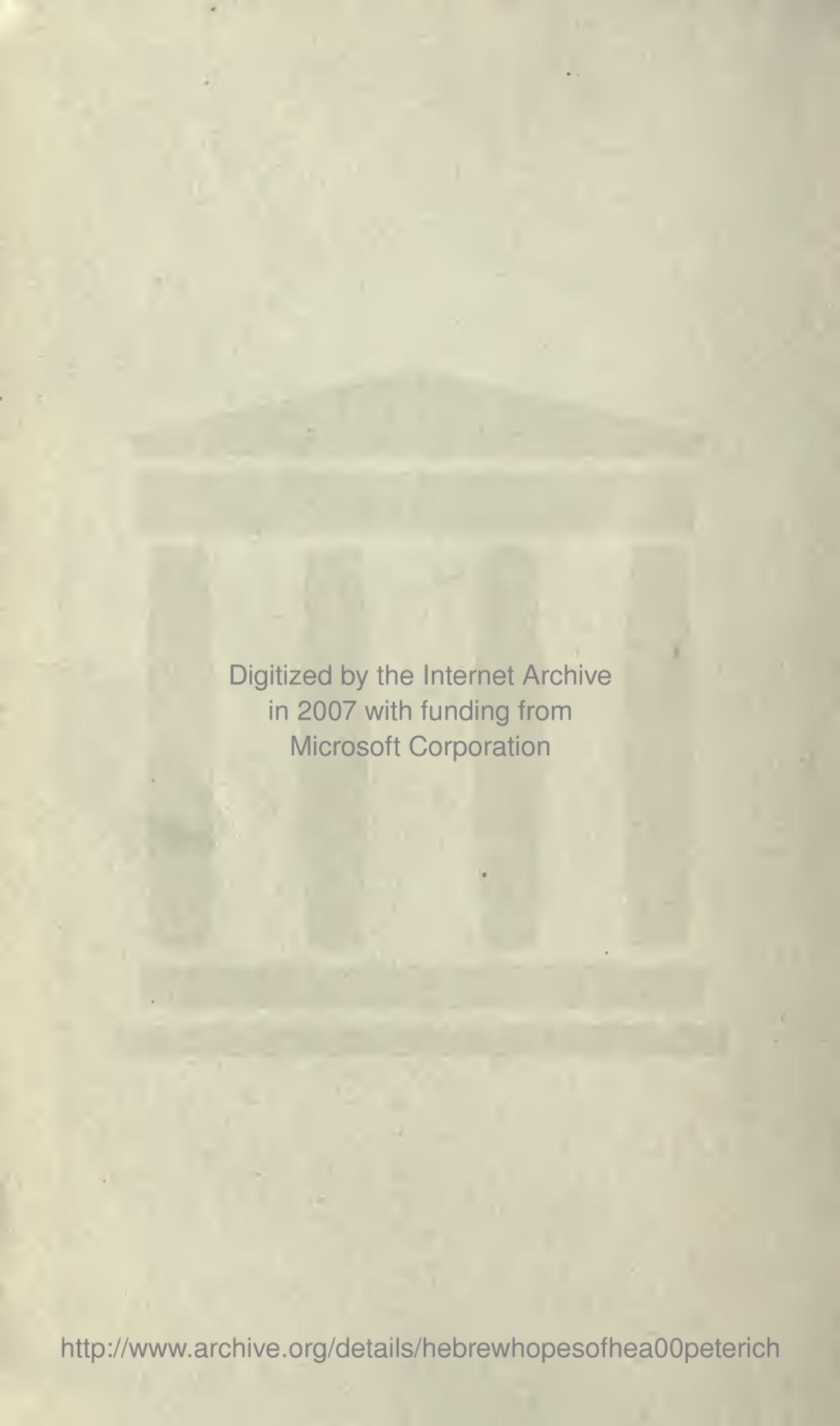
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HEBREW HOPES OF HEAVEN

What the Old Testament Has to Say

About the Great Hereafter

BY

MADISON C. PETERS

Author of "Justice to the Jew," "After Death—What?"
"Sermons that Won the Masses," "Abraham
Lincoln's Religion," etc., etc.

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HEBREW HOPES OF HEAVEN

This world is not conclusion;
A sequel stands beyond,
Invisible as music,
But positive as sound.

—*Emily Dickinson.*

We do not believe in immortality because we have proved it, but we forever try to prove it because we believe it.—*Martineau.*

The grave itself is but a covered bridge leading from light to light through a brief darkness.

—*Longfellow.*

For tho' from out our bourne of Time and Place
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have crossed the Bar.

—*Tennyson.*



HEBREW HOPES OF HEAVEN



THE GREAT HEREAFTER is an ever-present underlying fact which runs like a golden thread from Genesis to Revelation. Like the existence of God, the Bible takes for granted our immortality, assuring those who are in fellowship with God of a blessed life beyond the horizon of death.

It is popularly supposed that the glorified union of the soul and the body in the future life is pre-eminently a doctrine of the New Testament. Indeed many writers strangely pretend to doubt whether the Hebrews of old knew anything at all of another life.

The Bible starts out with the conception that man sustains relations to God which are never to cease. The creation of man is not explained scientifically, how matter or man were created, there are no theories indulged as to man's origin, except that God created him in His own image: "So God created man in His own image." (Genesis, ii:26).

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The body was made out of pre-existent material, generated, his soul was created out of nothing, the body so exquisitely organized was a mass of inert matter until God endowed it with vitality.

The material likeness of God was not referred to. God has no corporeal image: "And the Lord God spake unto you out of the midst of the fire, ye heard the voice of the words, but saw no similitude, only ye heard the voice." (Deut. iv:12.)

To the Hebrews "in the image of God" meant that they were created with a soul invisible and undying as the Divine Spirit. Thus we are told: "The Lord God formed man out of dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." (Gen. ii:7.) Here emphatic expression is given to man's two-fold nature.

The doctrine of a dual life is disclosed even in the fact that the Hebrew synonym for life has a plural form. "The breath of life"—literally, lives, or "the soul of lives." Thus on the very first page of the Pentateuch the immortality of the soul was a principle well known and fully understood.

The Old Testament plainly draws a distinction

Concerned that the spirit is
the eternal

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between spirit and flesh: "And they fell on their faces and said, O! God, the God of the spirits of all flesh." (Numbers xvi:22.) "But his flesh upon him shall have pain. His soul within shall mourn." (Job xiv:22.) "Flesh" and "soul" are placed in contradistinction—the flesh is "upon him," and the soul is "within him." "But there is a spirit in man and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding." (Job xxxii:8.) "The Lord formeth the spirit of man within him." (Zech. xii:2.)

The original decree of death implies only the death of the body—"for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." And Ecclesiastes, xii:7, "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was; and the spirit shall return unto God, who gave it," is only an explanation of the scope and design of the decree that the "dust" or body only is to "return to the earth as it was," while the spirit, "the breath of lives," blown into Adam by his Creator, was not dust, nor "taken out of the ground," but is to "return unto God who gave it." The spirit, therefore, has no affinity for the material clod, and

(Handwritten notes)

Secular
decrees

Look up
Explanation

was not doomed to the dust with the body at death.

“Enoch walked with God: and he was not, for God took him.” (Gen. v:24.) The miracle of Enoch’s translation was a divine intimation pointing to the existence of an invisible world. “He was not, for God took him”—implies, first, that he was exempted from natural death, and second, that he entered upon a higher existence as a consequence of having walked with God—he is advanced to a new stage of life, and this translation of Enoch is one of the strongest proofs of the belief in a future state, prevailing among the Hebrews; without this belief the history of Enoch is as Kalisch puts it—“A hieroglyph without a clue.” There could not be a more impressive revelation of the existence of God, and of the eternal separation of those who serve Him and who serve Him not; of the life and immortality—especially to be expected after departure from this world.

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How could Noah have been “a preacher of righteousness” without having some motive to present from another world, or without exhibiting the end of righteousness, which is “quietness and assur-

*The story of Noah by virtue of its
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ance forever?" The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews (xi) tells us that what Noah and the patriarchs did they did "by faith." Faith itself implies the knowledge of a future life, for it is "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." The same writer says that Abraham and a host of others looked for a heavenly country.

The strong desire which reigned in the hearts of the Old Testament saints to be buried together with their kindred in the same place is proof that they believed in perpetual union with their friends through death in a future life. They had lived together in life; they wished to lie together in death; to rise together in resurrection and to dwell together in everlasting habitations.

The familiar phrase, "gathered to his people," or "gathered to his fathers," does not mean simply to die or to be buried in the family tomb, but it meant joining them in the other world. This is the clear decision of the best commentators of the various schools. Says Gerlach on Genesis xv:15: "Thou shalt go to thy fathers or thy people, in peace, is the gracious expression for a life after

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death." Says Baumgarten: "A continuance after death is assuredly expressed therein." Knobel remarks on Genesis xxv:8, "Abraham was gathered to his fathers, was associated with his ancestors in sheol."

Sheol, like the Greek Hades, is a general term, meaning simply eternity, or the regions of the dead, without designating the particular condition of the dead as happy or miserable. Their actual condition must be determined by the context.

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just the
of persons*

The phrase "to go to his fathers," "to be gathered to his fathers," and the very common one "to sleep with his fathers" all have the same meaning. Delitzsch takes the same ground that—"The union with the fathers is not mere union of corpses, but of persons."

This view is strongly reinforced by the repeated designation of the whole present life, however protracted, as a pilgrimage. Perhaps the earliest representation of our life to be found in the Bible escaped from the lips of Jacob, when in answer to Pharoah's question: "How old art thou?" he said: "Few and evil have the days of the years of my pilgrimage been."

Man is the sport of a fact which he does not recognize—his life is a pilgrimage—but he is trying to make it a final condition. He is a pilgrim, not a resident. The world is good, for pilgrims, but bad for residents. Like a road, good for traveling, but not good for sleeping.

When man attempts to make this earth his final abode, he finds himself in collision with a higher law which makes him miserable, but which will neither bend nor break to accommodate him. His restlessness is the voice of God seeking to shake him out of his slumbers and compel him to recognize his own immortality.

The Hebrews regarded life as a journey on the face of the earth. The traveler as they supposed, when he arrived at the end of his journey, which happened when he died, was received into the company of his ancestors, who had gone before him. As the Talmud has it: "This world is like a roadside inn, but the world to come is like a real home." Your past life has been down-hill and toward gloom; your future is up-hill toward the glorious sunrise.

Dying is throwing open the door that the bird

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may fly out of its netted cage and be heard singing in higher flights and in diviner realms.

This visiting of the fathers has reference to the immortal part, and is clearly distinguished from the mere burial of the body. The closing scenes of the life of Moses, his journey up the peaks of Pisgah and Nebo to die, together with his message that he left with the people assuring them that God would meet him, must all have made very real to the people the truth that there was a life beyond the grave.

A decisive indication amounting to a positive proof of a belief in the continued existence of the departed is the practice of the magical invocation of the dead, a practice which Moses was obliged to prohibit by law. In Deut. xviii:10, 11, he commands: "There shall not be found among you any one that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer."

The clear comment of this law, and conclusive proof of the strong hold of the belief and practice upon the nation, is found in the interview of Saul

with the Witch of Endor (I Samuel, xxviii:7-20). Saul went with the demand: "Bring me him up whom I shall name unto thee." The woman's reply shows that this was a common pretension of the whole class of wizards: "Behold, thou knowest what Saul hath done, how he cut off those who have familiar spirits, and wizards out of the land; wherefore then layest thou a snare for my life to cause me to die?" When Saul had reassured her, she inquires in a most sweeping way: "Whom shall I bring up unto thee?" He calls for Samuel. The sequel need not be related.

There is no disguising the fact that there were persons in Israel who pretended to summon the dead into communication with the living, and the belief in their power was so general as to require a special exertion of the king's authority to banish them from the kingdom, and the belief in spiritualism was so deep-seated that even the king himself was a victim of the delusion. But the prevalent belief in the ability to bring up the dead must have rested on an equally prevalent belief that the dead were still in being.

Balaam, the heathen prophet, saw the light of

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immortality when he prayed: "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his." (Numbers xxxiii:10.)

Again take the ascent of Elijah in a chariot of fire. (II Kings, ii:1-11.) "Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven"—literally—*Elijah went up in a storm into the heavens*," the visible firmament or sky. The only honest exegesis of this passage is the teaching that Elijah was taken from the earth, like Enoch, without dying. The horses and chariots were rather the *accompaniment* than the *means* of this translation. Can we believe that Israel had no conception of its meaning? It needed figuration to intimate that though absent from earth, he was present with God.

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It is clear that the sentence, "the soul that sinneth, it shall die" and the promise that he who "repenteth and turned to righteousness shall live," must have involved a future beyond the limits of man's earthly existence.

In the dying song of Moses, he exclaims: "Oh, that they were wise, that they would consider their latter end!" (Deut. xxxii:29.) Consider the latter end of life and the future state of the soul—

look up "Eschatology"

think of death as your removal from a world of sense to a world of spirits, as the final period of your state of trial and probation and entrance upon a state of recompense and retribution.

Of all the passages of the Old Testament that bear upon the problems of eschatology, few compare in their pregnant significance with Ezekiel's declaration that "the Lord hath no pleasure in the death of him that dieth," but was evermore seeking to bring him back to life.

David with no uncertain voice expresses his belief that he would one day be reunited with his beloved child: "And he said while the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, who can tell whether God will be gracious unto me and the child may live? But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return unto me." (Samuel, xii:22-23.)

Surely David did not think of his child as just among the dead and comfort himself with the hope he too should soon die, and be, like him in the grave and free from trouble. Instead of yielding to despair, he was cheerfully resigned at the thought of

going to his child. How many parents would have been drawn after their sainted children into the grave by a cord of unrelenting grief, were it not that they draw consolation and hope from the same source wherewith this royal parent was comforted: "I shall go to him."

David's deep convictions of immortality breathe in his Psalms. "For thou wilt not leave my soul to Sheol, neither wilt thou suffer thy holy one to see corruption." (Psalm xvi:10.) "As for me I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I shall awake with thy likeness." (Psalm xiv:15.) "But God shall redeem my soul from the power of the grave; for he shall receive me." (Psalm xlix:15.) "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me into glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none on earth that I desire beside thee. My heart and my flesh faileth; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever." (Psalm lxxiii: 24-26.)

The sacrifices of the temple, the solemn ritual of the day of atonement, the sense of guilt which uttered itself in confession like Psalm, li, the anti-

cipation of deliverance from guilt—all implies the thought that the mischief wrought by sin did not terminate with death, and that there was a restoration from it possible even after death.

David could look forward to the journey through the valley of death without fear, for the Divine Guide would be with him even there. (Psalm xxiii:4.)

David seems sometimes to have taken a dark view of death. For instance: "For in death there is no remembrance; in the grave who shall give thee thanks?" (Psalm vi:5.) Or, again: "What profit is there in my blood, when I go down to the pit? Shall the dust praise thee? Shall it declare thy truth?" (Psalm xxx:9.) These texts read only by themselves apparently justify the assertion that the belief of individual Israelites concerning the future state was doubtful. But examine these verses in their context and you will find them quite consistent with a belief in a life beyond the grave. Rabbi Herrman Alder says:

"The Psalms from which the extracts in question are taken were composed at a season of extreme depression, when the writer was sick unto

death, when David felt himself estranged from God in consequence of his great sin. What prospect does this after-state offer unto him who has forfeited heaven's favor? He is aware that the earthly life is the season for serving God, and that only by sincere and active repentance can he obtain forgiveness of his trespass. If opportunity be not given him for working out his soul's salvation, he has grievous cause to dread divine punishment.

"The revealed word of God does not describe the nature of his penalty. It only hints at it by the terrible phrase of 'cutting off the soul.' From this annihilation he prays to be delivered, 'Return, O Lord, deliver my soul; O save me for thy mercy's sake! For in death there is no remembrance of thee; in the grave who shall give thee thanks?' (Psalm vi:4-5.)

He laments in the bitterness of his grief, that if he be cut off in his sin, he will be unable to serve his God. But how can it be maintained that David had no firm belief in immortality? David, who, when he is at peace with God, declares with unshaken confidence, 'As for me, I will behold Thy

face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake with Thy likeness.'

"The sublime truth sung by the sweet singer of Israel is echoed with no less fervor and vigor by the other Psalmists. The forty-ninth Psalm presents the doubts as to divine justice which crowd upon the minds of those who are troubled by the apparent glory of the careless and insolent, and the sorrows of the poor and virtuous. The Psalmist announces the answer to our questioning and disquietude. The morning comes which follows the night of death, and with it comes the awakening; the beauty and grandeur of the wicked and haughty fall into utter dissolution: 'But God will redeem my soul from the power of the nether world, for he shall receive me.' (Verse 15.) Fired by real living faith in a living God, he feels assured that there is a future state in which the just Ruler of the world will make full amends for the unequal distribution of burdens which He wisely permits in this life of probation."

This thought is dwelt upon with greater emphasis by Asaph in Psalm lxxiii, where the writer seeing how unevenly the balances swing here, asks:

"Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power? Is there no punishment for the workers of iniquity? Is there no God that judgeth in the earth?" And indeed were there no retribution beyond the limits of this present life, we should be necessarily obliged to admit one or the other of the following conclusions: Either that no Moral Governor of the world exists or that 'Justice and judgment' are not 'thy habitation of His throne.'

*(proof
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Isaiah, with the spirit of the Lord upon him announces: "He shall destroy death forever, and the Lord God shall wipe away tears off all faces." (xxv:8.) And again he addresses his sublime appeal to the house of Israel: "Thy dead men shall live, thy dead bodies will rise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in the dust; for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead." (xxiv:24:19.)

Behold Ezekiel preach his splendid vision, the revival of the dead bones (chapter xxxvii) and who dare assert that the prophets were ignorant or careless of the doctrine of a future life?

Job appeals from his narrow-minded judges on

earth to God on high, beseeching him to hear and try his cause, and in the strength of his appeal his eye grows clear and undimmed. His sickness appears mortal, he has no hope in life, but his intense conviction that justice must and will be done to him possesses him more and more: "For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth and after my skin has been destroyed, yet out of my flesh shall I see God." (xix:25-26.) This is the sum total of all that has been said and written concerning immortality—"After my dissolution I shall see God."

The book of Ecclesiastes shows forth the weariness which overtakes the man whose chief aim of life is sensual gratification, whose mind gloomed by doubt and disgust with sin, utters the despairing cry: "For that which befallmeth them, as the one dies, so dieth the others." But the book likewise shows us the process by which men are to fight out and win over the doubts that spring up in their hearts. At the end the preacher gives utterance to the emphatic declaration: "Then shall the dust return unto the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return to God who gave it." (vii:7.) In these

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words there is neither doubt nor wavering. The dualism of man's nature is fully acknowledged. Entire belief in the soul's immortality triumphs over all the gloom and weariness that had tinged his previous meditations, removing at once and forever the proposal to "Lie in dull oblivion and to rot."

In the same chapter we find a very distinct assertion of future retribution: "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." (13-14.) That the judgment here spoken of is future is clear from verse seven of the same chapter, where the writer speaks of the appearance of the spirit, separated from the body, before God, to receive the compensation for its works.

Still more distinct, if possible, is the utterance of Daniel: "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall wake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness

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of the firmament; and they that turn to righteousness, as the stars forever and ever." (xii 2-3.)

Let us now turn to a New Testament scene, yet none the less Jewish. The body of Moses slept in the valley of the land of Moab, but his spirit, not sleeping or unconscious by waiting in the grave for the sound of the last trumpet, had been fourteen hundred years in heaven, and in recognizable form talked with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. Moses and Elijah were not creations of excited imagination, but actually present and surely visible, and their presence there was intended to teach that centuries after their death, those heroes of Israel were alive, active and interested in the same great subjects as when on earth, and I am almost forced to believe that the citizens of eternity know what is taking place down here on earth. If you are living an ungodly life the loved ones in glory are conscious of it, yet—if you are noble and true your life ascends like a sweet-smelling incense. There is as much truth for the believing Jew as for the sincere Christian in the lines of the song:

"Bright as the morning, fair as the day,
Loved ones in glory, looking this way."

unscripted

THE TALMUD AND IMMORTALITY

A special mansion will be given in heaven to every pious man. * * *

This world is a road-side inn, but the world to come is a real home.

* * *

To the world of future bliss, like a vestibule is this. In the vestibule prepare for life eternal.

* * *

The longest life is insufficient for the fulfillment of half of man's desires.

* * *

He who lays up no store of good deeds during the working days of life can never enjoy the eternal Sabbath.

* * *

Weep for us who live to mourn, and not for him we have lost, for he to eternity has been borne.

* * *

A man departing from this world, departeth not alone; not gold, nor silver follow him, nor pearls, nor precious stones; good deeds go with him to life forever more.

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